Role of Women: The Quran states that “men are responsible for women.” Obeying men was seen as good. Women only influenced public issues indirectly through their husbands. Muslim women had more rights than European woman of the time who had almost none of the rights below. Islam improved women’s legal rights. Some improvements included:
- women could own property and keep it if they got married. Allowed to keep property after a divorce as well
- polygamy (practice of having several wives) was limited to 4 wives
- tribal custom of killing female infants was banned
- women could divorce if not being provided for and remarry
- could testify in court though it only counted as half a man’s testimony

Women’s lives focused on the family and its needs. Poor women helped in the fields and did house work. Wealthy women had more options. Many became scholars and taught or wrote poetry. All women were responsible for raising their children.

Urban Centers (Cities): Damascus was the major trading city until Baghdad was formed in 762. Both continued to be major cities of Islam. Other cities such as Kufa and Basra grew from Arab military settlements. Converts from the countryside migrated to the cities. Cities were the cultural and governmental centers of the Muslim empire. Cities like Baghdad with its House of Wisdom allowed for Islamic achievements by providing support and drawing thinkers from around the world.

Houses had thick dried mud and brick walls with very few windows to keep the inside cool. Most homes were plain with a few pieces of furniture and carpets. The rich had large homes with courtyards filled with gardens and fountains.

Cities were divided between business and residential areas. The center of the city is where important government, business, and religious buildings were. Common homes were on the outskirts of the city center.

Trade and Farming: Muslims dominated trade in the Middle East and North Africa. By sea they were linked to Europe by the Mediterranean Sea and to Asia by the Indian Ocean. The Silk Roads linked them by land to China and India. Throughout this massive trading network only Arabic and the Abbasid dinar (money) were needed for Muslim merchants.

The goods ended up in city bazaars (marketplaces) where shops sold them. Europeans would go to major bazaars and buy Asian goods which the Europeans sent to Italy. From Italy the goods went all over Europe. There were large warehouses and places to rest for visiting merchants.

Growing food was difficult in many areas of the Islamic empire because of the dry climate and lack of water. Farming was controlled by large landowners who employed farmers from nearby villages to work. They used irrigation to produced wheat, rice, beans, cucumbers, celery, mint, almonds, blackberries, figs, and olives. Irrigation methods introduced to Spain allowed for more cash crops such as cherries, pears, and bananas to be grown in Spain.